



IMAGE UNITED

CHAPTER TWO

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NEW YORK.

I WILL RULE
THIS WORLD AS I
NOW RULE HELL. I AM
AWARE OF THE POWER
YOU WIELD, ALTHOUGH
I SENSE YOU ARE
NOT.

YOU WILL
GROW TO HATE
THIS SYSTEM AS MUCH
AS I-- THIS TUG OF WAR
BETWEEN HEAVEN AND
HELL OVER THE
PEOPLE OF THIS
WORLD.

BUT I PLAN
TO END IT, JIM.
DOWNING. I PLAN TO
END IT ALL.

STOP
RIGHT THERE. IF
YOU'RE ASKING ME
TO HELP YOU END THE
WORLD--THE ANSWER,
SURPRISINGLY,
IS NO.

THEN YOU
WILL PERISH
ALONG
WITH IT!

**FWA
BOOSH!**

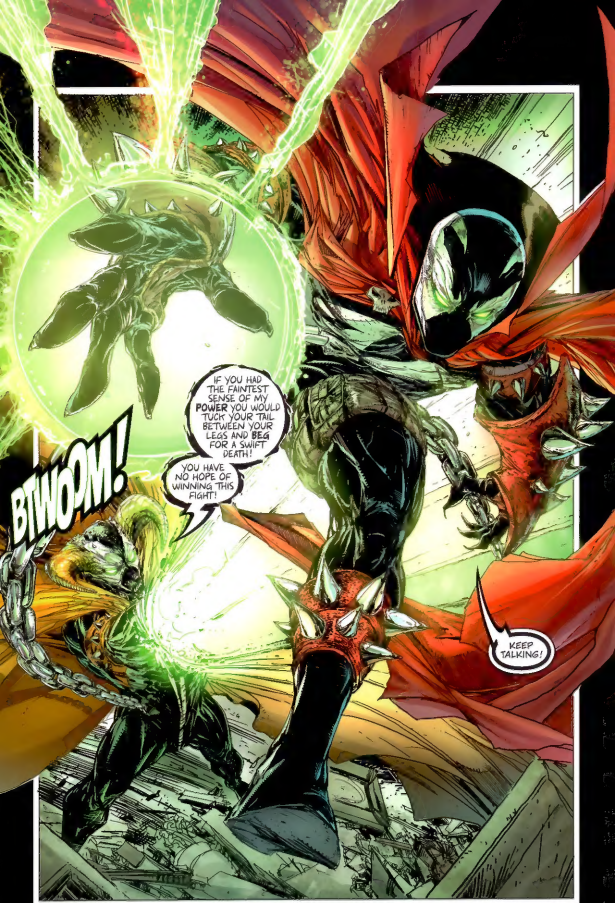
YOU
WOULD HAVE BEEN A
POWERFUL ALLY. YOU
COULD HAVE STOOD BY MY
SIDE AS WE MARCHED THE
ARMIES OF THIS WORLD
TO HEAVEN--

--WATCHED AS
THE COMBINED
FORCES OF EARTH
AND HELL TORE THAT
WORLD ASUNDER--
COMPLETING MY
MASTER PLAN.

NOW
YOUR LIFE
WILL END WITH
YOUR SKULL
CRUSHED
BENEATH MY
HEEL!

WAIT A MINUTE
YOU'RE AL SIMMONS--
RIGHT? YOU WORE THIS SUIT
BEFORE ME--OKAY, AND
NOW YOU'VE COMPLETELY
LOST YOUR MIND.

FWOOSH!



IF YOU HAD
THE FAINTEST
SENSE OF MY
POWER YOU WOULD
TUCK YOUR TAIL
BETWEEN YOUR
LEGS AND BEG
FOR A SWIFT
DEATH!

YOU HAVE
NO HOPE OF
WINNING THIS
FIGHT!

KEEP
TALKING!

BIWOOM!





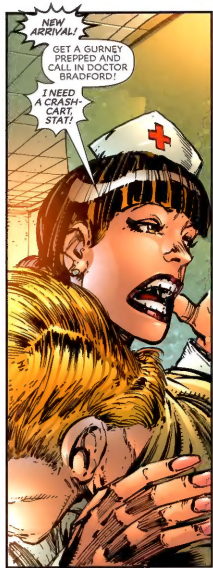


HE--
HE JUST
SHOWED
UP OUT OF
NOWHERE!
HE-- IT DON'T
MAKE ANY
SENSE!

SAVE YOUR
STRENGTH, YOU'RE
SAFE NOW. WE'LL
TAKE GOOD CARE
OF YOU.

HE'S
COMING...
WE'VE GOT
TO...

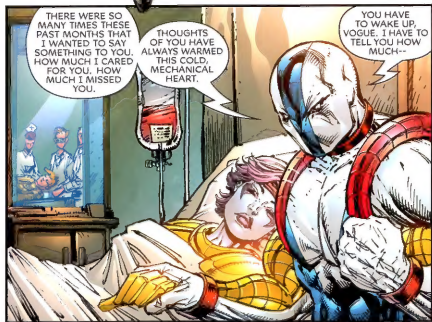
HE'S...



NEW
ARRIVAL!

GET A GURNEY
PREPPED AND
CALL IN DOCTOR
BRADFORD!

I NEED
A CRASH-
CART,
STAT!



THERE WERE SO
MANY TIMES THESE
PAST MONTHS THAT
I WANTED TO SAY
SOMETHING TO YOU.
HOW MUCH I CARED
FOR YOU. HOW
MUCH I MISSED
YOU.

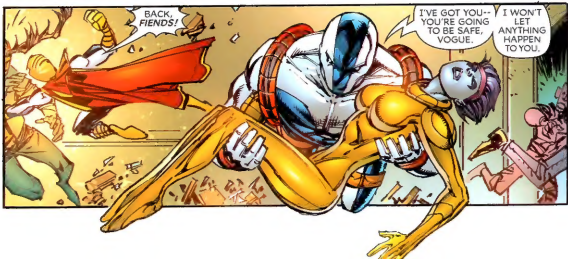
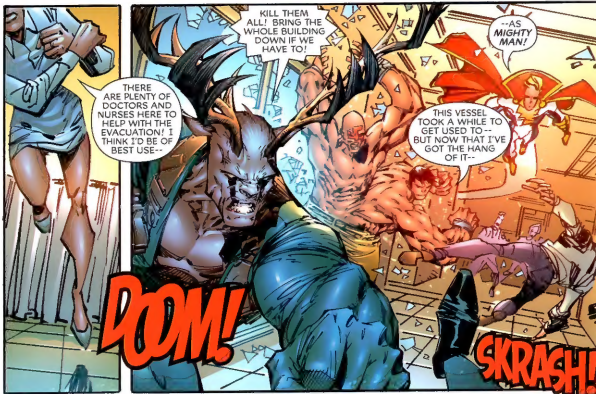
THOUGHTS OF YOU HAVE
ALWAYS WARMED
THIS COLD,
MECHANICAL
HEART.

YOU HAVE
TO WAKE UP,
VOGUE. I HAVE TO
TELL YOU HOW
MUCH--



GOOM!

WHAT--?!



LIBERTY ISLAND.

YOUNGBLOOD HQ.



MY NAME IS BAXTER MONTGOMERY. I'M 23 YEARS OLD, I DON'T HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD...AND I'M TRAPPED IN THIS SUIT.

I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT IT--THIS IS ALL STILL VERY NEW TO ME. I THINK IT...**ABSORBS** ENERGY. LIKE, SOMETIMES LIGHTS FLICKER AROUND ME--AND I ABSORBED THE POWERS OF A SUPER-VILLAIN.*

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW IS TOO MUCH OF A COINCIDENCE. I KNOW THESE VISIONS ARE REAL. THEY'RE COMING FROM THE SUIT...

...OR SOMEWHERE ELSE.

* SEE IMAGE UNITED #0.









CHICAGO.

**BRAKKA!
BRAKKA!
BRAKKA!
BRAKKA!**

EVERYONE
STAY BACK--
THIS THING IS
MELTING
EVERYTHING IT
TOUCHES!

I'VE GOT
IT
COVERED!



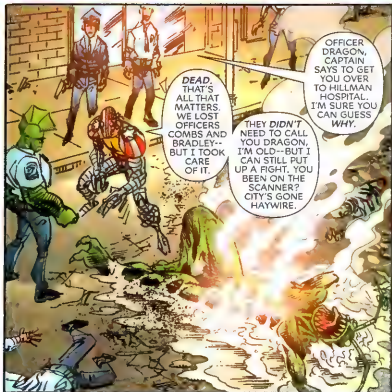
BOY,
THEY WERE
RIGHT TO
CALL ME IN!
WHAT THE
HELL WAS
THAT THING,
SUPER-
PATRIOT?



DEAD.
THAT'S
ALL THAT
MATTERS.
WE LOST
OFFICERS
COMBS AND
BRADLEY--
BUT I TOOK
CARE
OF IT.

THEY DIDN'T
NEED TO CALL
YOU DRAGON,
I'M OLD--BUT I
CAN STILL PUT
UP A FIGHT. YOU
BEEN ON THE
SCANNER?
CITY'S GONE
HAYWIRE.

OFFICER
DRAGON,
CAPTAIN
SAYS TO GET
YOU OVER
TO HILLMAN
HOSPITAL.
I'M SURE YOU
CAN GUESS
WHY.





WRAMM!

THIS BUILDING'S COMING DOWN!

WE'LL TAKE YOU OUT AND THEN MOVE ON TO THE NEXT ONE! WE CAN'T BE STOPPED!



MIGHTY MAN-- WHAT'S GOING ON?!

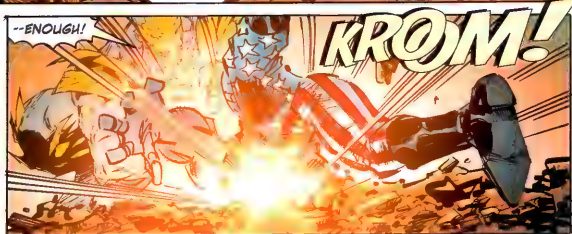
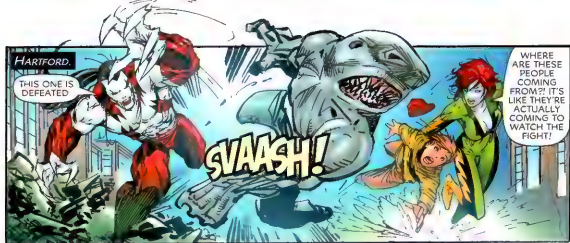
THESE GUYS AREN'T SO TOUGH-- THEY JUST KEEP CATCHING ME OFF GUARD BECAUSE I'M TRYING TO HELP EVACUATE THE PATIENTS.

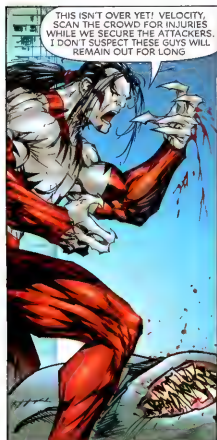


NO CLUE WHAT THEY'RE AFTER-- JUST DESTRUCTION, IT SEEMS.

THEN LET'S PUT A STOP TO IT!







THIS ISN'T OVER YET! VELOCITY, SCAN THE CROWD FOR INJURIES WHILE WE SECURE THE ATTACKERS. I DON'T SUSPECT THESE GUYS WILL REMAIN OUT FOR LONG



FEELS GOOD TO CUT LOOSE!

NICE JOB, NEW GUY.



YEAH, "NEW GUY." WHO EXACTLY ARE YOU?

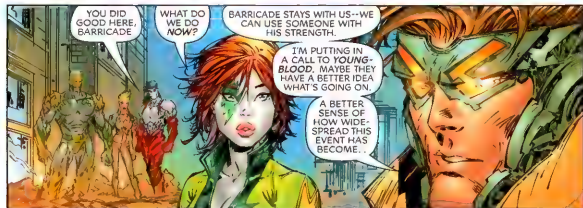
WELL...



I DON'T... MY MEMORIES BEFORE I WAS GIVEN MY POWERS ARE SPOTTY AT BEST. I CAN'T REMEMBER MUCH. HONESTLY--I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO I AM.

BUT I REMEMBER CYBERDATA--THEY MADE ME INTO THIS--GAVE ME THESE POWERS. I BELIEVE I WAS CREATED TO...HUNT YOU DOWN. I WAS FREED WHEN THESE GUYS DESTROYED THE FACILITY HOLDING ME.

THEY CALLED ME BARRICADE.



YOU DID GOOD HERE, BARRICADE

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

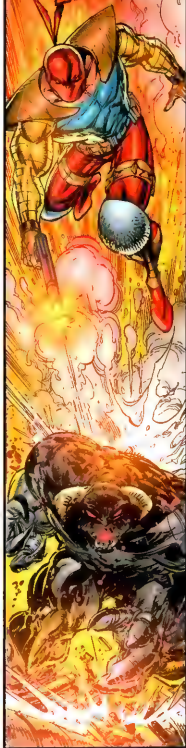
BARRICADE STAYS WITH US--WE CAN USE SOMEONE WITH HIS STRENGTH.

I'M PUTTING IN A CALL TO YOUNG-BLOOD. MAYBE THEY HAVE A BETTER IDEA WHAT'S GOING ON.

A BETTER SENSE OF HOW WIDE-SPREAD THIS EVENT HAS BECOME...

SEATTLE.

**BRAKKA!
BRAKKA!
BRAKKA!**



HUNTINGTON.

I KNEW I
SHOULD NEVER
HAVE COME
HERE! WHAT DO
YOU WANT? WHY
ARE YOU
ATTACKING?!



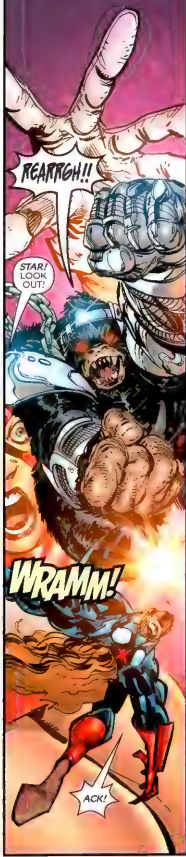
ST. LOUIS.

REARRGH!!

STAR!
LOOK
OUT!

WRAMM!

ACK!



ORLANDO.

YOU'VE
JUST MADE
THE BIGGEST
MISTAKE
OF YOUR
LIFE!

OOH,
SCARY!

DETROIT.

KILL-CAT,
WHAT ARE
YOU DOING?!
WE JUST
GOT HERE!

PATHETIC!

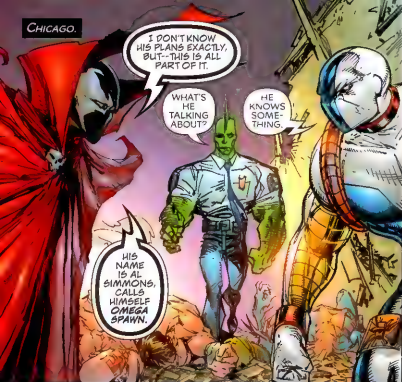
GOT
HIM--
--ON THE
ROPE!

LOS ANGELES.

DO YOU
HAVE ANY
IDEA WHO
YOU'RE
DEALING
WITH?

YOU'LL
SOON
FIND
OUT.

CHICAGO.



NEW YORK.







IMAGE UNITED ORIGINS

PART TWO

I first met Robert Kirkman at a barbeque in Chicago back in 2002. He was writing a *SuperPatriot* miniseries for Erik Larsen and was getting ready to launch the first issue of *Tech Jacket*. He'd also just turned in a pitch for a book he wanted to call "Bulletproof," but what he really wanted to talk about at that barbeque was why Image wasn't publishing *Battle Pope*.

In case you'd never heard of Robert before he launched *Invincible* and *The Walking Dead*, he was all about *Battle Pope* in the years leading up to those two books. Even though he'd published the book through his own Funk-O-Tron Studios, he was still eager to have it repackaged and reissued through Image – something he made very clear by sending copies and constantly cajoling then-Image Publisher Jim Valentino, Erik Larsen and myself. He was very enthusiastic.

And we loved him for it.

Robert was a big fan of Image. He was 13 when the company was starting up and the mass exodus of his favorite artists from Marvel had a tremendous effect on him. He picked up all the original series as they came out: *Youngblood*, *Spawn*, *Savage Dragon*, *WildC.A.T.s*, *CyberForce*, *ShadowHawk*. When the next wave of Image titles launched, Robert bought those, too. *Brigade*, *Supreme*, *Pitt*, *The Maxx*, *Bloodstrike*, *Stormwatch*, *Trencher*, *Gen 13*, *New Men...* all of them. Within the space of a couple years, he went from living and breathing Marvel Comics to not buying any of their books at all.

As Robert continued reading comics over the next couple of years, an idea began to take root: He wanted to write comics himself. Perhaps not surprisingly, given his enthusiasm for all things

Image, the actions of the Image founders served as his inspiration and he decided to start his career by creating and publishing his own comics.

Battle Pope – an extremely irreverent superhero parody – was his first foray into comics. Offensive by design, it was a love it or hate it series that nonetheless garnered a fair amount of interest and announced Robert as a burgeoning talent with plenty to say. After that came a *Battle Pope* spin-off, *Saint Michael*, and an anthology series called *Inkpunks Quarterly*. Then, in 2001, he launched a series called *Double Take*. Each issue featured two stories and by the end of the run, he was wrapping a Joe Casey/Charlie Adlard series that had begun at Image – *Codefresh* – and debuting new work by the likes of Matt Fraction and Andy Kuhn.

But despite his success as a publisher, Robert wanted to be at Image.

Robert had met Erik Larsen at a convention in Chicago around then and they hit off. Erik liked *Battle Pope* and when Robert mentioned he'd like to see it re-published through Image, Erik encouraged him to send copies to Valentino. *Battle Pope* didn't make the cut then, but Robert kept trying. He talked to Erik and Jim about doing a new superhero series called *Science Dog*. Cory Walker was the artist on that, and everyone agreed it was an interesting concept... but still, nothing.

Instead, Erik gave Robert and Cory free reign on four issues of *SuperPatriot*.

Once pages from *SuperPatriot: America's Fighting Force* started coming in, things started moving a little faster. Within weeks, Jim and I were looking at a pitch for *Tech Jacket* – a teen sci-fi/superhero book drawn by E.J. Su – and when that was approved, Robert came back with everything from



IMAGE UNITED ORIGINS

sci-fi zombie comics to a repackaged *Battle Pope* series (of course) and then this "Bulletproof" thing.

"Bulletproof" was a great concept, but neither Valentino nor I cared for the title. Cory Walker was on board to draw this one, too, and the character designs looked great. Image had just published a graphic novel called *Bulletproof Monk*, though, and that had been made into a film, so Jim argued that a new book with such a similar title would be a mistake. We told Robert we wanted to do the book, but he had to change the title. So "Bulletproof" became *Invincible*.

And then came *The Walking Dead*...

A little less than five years, *Invincible* and *The Walking Dead*, had become two of Image's biggest titles. Sales on both the single issues and the trades were consistently going up and Robert's popularity had increased to the point that in 2007, we'd chosen to launch his newest series, *The Astounding Wolf-Man*, as our Free Comic Book Day title.

Along the way, Robert had gotten to know Todd McFarlane. Robert and Todd had decided to work a new title together after a panel at San Diego Comic-Con International in 2006 and over the course of the months that followed, Todd was able to get a firsthand look at just how committed Robert was to Image. Robert was doing work for other publishers, but for anyone who knew him, it was clear his values and goals were more aligned with those of the Image founders than anyone else in comics.

So it wasn't a surprise when Todd suggested that Robert be made an Image partner – not only the first addition to the partnership since the company was founded, but the first writer, as well. Everyone was unanimous in his support for the move: The idea had never come up before, because there'd

never been anyone as unequivocal in his dedication to Image before Robert. It was almost as though it was meant to be.

And talk about a rite of passage: Before Robert could even take stock of his new stake in the company he'd been a fan of as a teenager, both his talents as a writer and his long-time history as an Image fan were being put to use.

Once Erik Larsen had made his pitch for the project to Rob, Todd, Whilce, Marc and Jim, only one question remained. It wasn't so much, "Who's going to write it," though, as it was, "Is Robert down for this?" Just as everyone had endorsed Robert's partnership, so, too, was everyone convinced he was the *only* writer for *Image United*. No one else was even considered.

Given the amount of work this project requires, there are probably days when Robert wishes someone else – anyone else! – *had* been considered, but not many people get the chance to bring things full circle the way he has. In 10 years, he went from reading to writing Image comics, and in even less time, he's gone from being an enthusiastic upstart to one of the company's driving forces.

And if you were to ask Robert to reflect on all that, he'd probably tell you he's just getting started...

Eric Stephenson
Publisher

Wongbhan Nuchit, a member of the
army in north Korea

IT'S MIDNIGHT IN
THE GARDEN OF GOOD
AND EVIL.

THERE ARE NO SHADES OF GREY IN
THIS BUSINESS. JUST GUYS IN BLACK
HATS AND GUYS IN WHITE HATS. IT
ALL DEPENDS ON WHAT SIDE OF THE
FENCE YOU'RE STANDING ON.

FROM WHERE I'M STANDING, I'M
ALWAYS WEARING A WHITE HAT AND
THE REST OF THE WORLD IS
WEARING THE BLACK HATS.

SOMETIMES THOUGH THE
GUYS WEARING THE WHITE
HATS HAVE TO GET THEIR
HANDS DIRTY. REAL DIRTY.


SPLASH

CABBOT STONE, FIELD-
COMMANDER, EXTREME FORCES,
BLOODSTRIKE DIVISION.
WEARING A WHITE HAT.

BLOODSTRIKE

Story
Rob Linnard
Script
Mark Paulsen
Art
Morot Mychalski
Jeremy Roberts
Mike Cappretti

SECTOR 4
IS CLEAR.
LAMBS ARE LINED UP
FOR SLAUGHTER...
BLOODSTRIKE
MOW 'EM DOWN.



BLOODSTRIKE: ASSASSIN.
THE FINEST KILLING MACHINE
MONEY CAN BUY.

BRAKKA!
BRAKKA!

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, BIG FELLA
SHOULD CREEP ME OUT. HE'S
ME. AND BY ME... I MEAN
HE'S MY CLONE.


PIECES OF ME,
RE-CONSTRUCTED,
RE-MASTERED AND COOKED UP
FOR MAXIMUM DAMAGE.

WATCHING HIM CLEAR A ROOM
ALWAYS CHOKES ME UP.
NEARLY MOVES ME TO TEARS.


THIS MUST BE WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR
A PARENT WATCHING THEIR BABY
TAKE THEIR FIRST FEW STEPS.

UNFORTUNATELY, IT LOOKS LIKE
THIS "BABY'S" REAR IS EXPOSED.
BUT IF YOU ASK THE BIG FELLA, HE
WOULD SAY HE'S JUST PLAYING
NICE WITH OTHERS.

THIS WAY COMBAT
DOESN'T FEEL
LEFT OUT.



COMBAT IS A MAN OF FEW WORDS. HE HATES EARTH AND LOVES KILLING AS MANY OF US AS LEGALLY POSSIBLE.



AN ALIEN FROM THE PLANET KATELLA, KH'MBAT EXISTS AND OPERATES UNDER AN UNEASY EMBARGO. BIG COLLAR, SHORT LEASH.

AFTER A BRIEF STINT WITH THE YOUNG-BLOOD DIVISION, HE'S BEEN RE-ASSIGNED TO BLOODSTRIKE. HE'S FLOURISHING UNDER MY COMMAND.



WAY TO GO WITH THE SLICE AND DICE, BARBARIAN.



F*CKIN' AMATEUR.



I LOVE YOU TOO, JAR JAR.



IT'S GOOD TO SEE THE KIDS PLAYING SO WELL TOGETHER.

HEAVY ARTILLERY HAS BEEN DISPATCHED IN SECTOR 5. IT LOOKS LIKE THE DEEPER WE PENETRATE THIS COMPOUND, THE MORE RESISTANCE WE'RE BOUND TO ENCOUNTER.




LUCKILY FOR US,
COVERT AGENTS
ARE IN PLACE...




AND HAVE BEEN
DISPATCHED.

HE'S A LOOSE CANNON WHO IS ALWAYS
TESTING MY LIMITS. WE'VE BUTTED
HEADS FOR YEARS, BUT HIS HOMICIDAL
TENDENCIES MAKE HIM IDEAL FOR THIS
OPERATION. HE'S A REANIMATED WEAPON
OF MASS DESTRUCTION THAT I GET TO
UNLEASH ON OUR ENEMIES...

IF THIS TEAM IS MY KIDS, DEADLOCK
WOULD BE MY PROBLEM CHILD. A FORMER
MEMBER OF THE SUPER-HUMAN TERRORIST
FORCE KNOWN AS THE FOUR, HE DIED
DURING A PRISON ESCAPE. UPON DEATH,
HE WAS ADMITTED TO PROJECT: BORN
AGAIN AND PLACED UNDER MY COMMAND.




THE COVENANT OF THE
SWORD. THESE MEN ARE
THEIR SOLDIERS.



OUR MISSION IS TO PREVENT THE
PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR
WEAPONS BEING DEVELOPED BY
THE NORTH KOREANS AND EXPOSE
THEIR TIES TO THE COVENANT.

SHRAK



SHOULD DEADLOCK RUN
INTO ANY PROBLEMS WE HAVE
AN ACE UP OUR SLEEVE.

WHICH ONE OF
YOU IS GOING TO
GIVE ME A DECENT
FIGHT, HUH?



WHO?

DEADLOCK,
I HOPE YOU
WEREN'T
TALKIN TO
ME.

NOT MUCH IS KNOWN ABOUT HER,
EXCEPT HER ABILITY WITH A BLADE IS
SECOND TO NONE. AND WHEN DEALING
WITH THE COVENANT OF THE SWORD,
SHE'LL HELP US CUT DOWN THEIR
RANKS.

THAT IS IF SHE AND
DEADLOCK DON'T KILL
EACH OTHER FIRST

LETHAL,
IT'S ABOUT TIME
YOU SHOWED UP. LEAVE
IT TO A WOMAN TO SHOW
UP FASHIONABLY LATE
TO A PARTY.

GIVE ME A
BREAK. IF I
HADN'T SHOWN
UP WHEN I DID, THEY
WOULDN'T CALL YOU
DEADLOCK. THEY WOULD
JUST CALL YOU
DEAD.

BUT FIRST,
HOW ABOUT WE
HELP THE
REINFORCE-
MENTS? WHAT DO
YOU SAY?

LETHAL, MY OTHER COVERT AGENT.
WE TANGLED IN THE PAST WHEN SHE
WAS HOOKED UP WITH MY
BROTHER'S OUTFIT, BRIGADE. SINCE
THEN, SHE'S WISED UP AND JOINED
THE WINNING TEAM AND I COULDN'T
BE HAPPIER TO HAVE HER.



DARLIN',
I COULD LISTEN
TO YOUR SWEET
PILLOW TALK
ALL NIGHT...

REMIND
ME TO
KILL YOU
LATER.

"CONSIDER IT A DATE, LETHAL."

TROLL LEADS THE REINFORCEMENTS INTO BATTLE. ON LOAN FROM THE YOUNGBLOOD DIVISION, BARTHOLOMEW J. TROLL IS PROVING TO BE A VALUABLE ASSET.

CLEAR THE WAY, GUYS! IT'S TROLL TIME!

GET READY TO MEET YOUR MAKER, YA CREEPS!

NOT ONLY IS HE SKILLED IN HAND TO HAND COMBAT, BUT WITH LITERALLY CENTURIES OF EXPERIENCE UNDER HIS BELT HE IS A MASTER STRATEGIST.

AT LEAST THE TWERP IS WHEN THE HE'S NOT DOLLING OUT ATTEMPTS AT WITTY BANTER.

BEFORE WE CONSUMMATE THIS THING WITH THE COVENANT, HOW 'BOUT A LITTLE FOURPLAY?

THAT JOKE IS AS GERIATRIC AS YOU OLD MAN.


THIS OLD MAN COULD YOU TEACH YOU A THING OR TWO, TOOTS.

FOURPLAY HAS BEEN WITH ME JUST AS LONG AS DEADLOCK, AND HAS BEEN RESURRECTED THANKS TO PROJECT: BORN AGAIN JUST AS MANY TIMES.

THEN THERE'S LYNX, THE DEPOSED LEADER OF JAKARRA, COMES FROM THE SAME RACE AS YOUNGBLOOD'S COUGAR.

I WAS NEVER A CAT PERSON. MOM AND DAD DIDN'T ALLOW ME OR JOHNNY ANY PETS, BUT LYNX MAY HAVE JUST FOUND HERSELF A HOME WITH US.

THIS KITTEN HAS CLAWS.

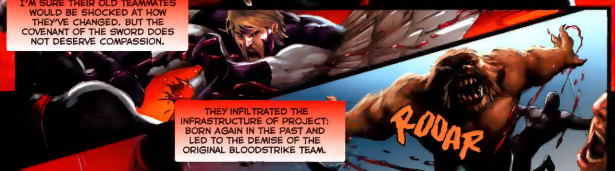


WITH THE REINFORCEMENTS TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS IN SECTOR 5, I SEND OUT OUR NEWEST RECRUITS TO DO A SWEEP OF SECTOR 6 AND GET SOME VALUABLE FIELD TIME.

KODIAK AND BYRD, A COUPLE OF FORMER MEMBERS OF THE NEWMEN.


I HAD MY RESERVATIONS ABOUT THEM JOINING, BUT THEY HAVE PROVEN TO BE ABLE TO ADAPT TO MY METHODS QUICKLY. THEY'RE EAGER TO IMPRESS THEIR NEW FAMILY.

I'M SURE THEIR OLD TEAMMATES WOULD BE SHOCKED AT HOW THEY'VE CHANGED. BUT THE COVENANT OF THE SWORD DOES NOT DESERVE COMPASSION.



THEY INFILTRATED THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF PROJECT: BORN AGAIN IN THE PAST AND LED TO THE DEMISE OF THE ORIGINAL BLOODSTRIKE TEAM.

ROOAR



AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, THEY ARE A PLAGUE THAT NEEDS TO BE ELIMINATED AT ALL COSTS. THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS TOO MUCH FORCE.

LIKE I SAID, THERE ARE NO SHADES OF GREY. THERE ARE JUST WHITE HATS AND BLACK HATS.

THIS IS OUR MISSION.

AND OUR MISSION NEVER ENDS.



IMAGE UNITED ISSUE THREE

ROBERT KIRKMAN

ROB LIEFELD

JIM VALENTINO

TODD McFARLANE

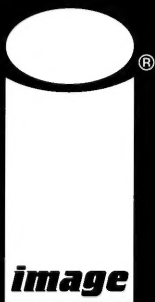
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